

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI  
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT  
AMEMBASSY MANAMA  
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L JIDDA 2008

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PDEV, BA, SA  
SUBJ: BAHRAIN-SAUDI CAUSEWAY: CAUSE FOR ALARM?

REF: MANAMA 520

1. DURING CALL ON BAHRAIN CHARGE YOUSEF ABDULLAH KHALIFA, POLITICAL OFFICER ASKED ABOUT SOME OF ISSUES RAISED REFTEL. KHALIFA SAID THAT SAUDIS TO HIS KNOWLEDGE HAVE NEVER EXERTED ANY PRESSURE ON BAHRAIN TO CHANGE ITS SOCIAL SYSTEM OR BRING IT MORE INTO LINE WITH WAHHABI VERSION OF ISLAMIC LAW. NOR DID HE FORESEE THEM DOING SO FOLLOWING CONSTRUCTION OF THE CAUSEWAY.

2. KHALIFA SAID HIS JUDGMENT WAS BASED ON THE SPECIAL NATURE OF SAUDI-BAHRAINI RELATIONS WHICH ARE VERY CLOSE DESPITE DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY. SPECIFICALLY, MANY BAHRAINIS REGARD SAUDI ARABIA AS THE "MOTHER COUNTRY", AND THERE ARE MANY BAHRAINIS WITH CLOSE FAMILIAL TIES TO SAUDI EASTERN PROVINCE. ON ITS PART, THE SAUDI ARABIAN GOVERNMENT RESPECTS THE SOVEREIGN RIGHTS OF ITS FRIENDLY NEIGHBOR, VIEWING BAHRAIN'S CHOICE OF SOCIAL SYSTEM AS

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ESSENTIALLY A PRIVATE MATTER.

3. KHALIFA'S COMMENT IS SIMILAR TO THAT OF BAHRAINI FOREIGN MINISTER SHAIKH MOHAMMAD (PARA 2 REFTEL) WHO SAID THAT THOSE WHO EXPECT DEMANDS FOR CHANGE FROM SAUDIS UNDERSTAND NEITHER SAUDIS NOR NATURE OF SAUDI-BAHRAINI RELATIONSHIP. FYI: THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND ISLAM EITHER, SINCE

THERE IS NOTHING ISLAMIC ABOUT CLOSING SHOPS OR PLACES  
OF WORK ON FRIDAYS. END FYI.

4. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT EXAMPLE OF SAUDI "PRES-SURE" FOR CHANGE CITED PARA 3 REFTEL (BANNING MALE HAIRDRESSERS IN LADIES' SALONS) CAME NOT FROM ANY SAUDI GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL, BUT FROM SAUDI RELIGIOUS LEADERS. PERHAPS THE VERY CLOSENESS OF EASTERN PROVINCE-BAHRAIN RELATIONS GAVE THESE LEADERS IMPRESSION THEY COULD COMMENT ON SOCIAL CONDITIONS ON NEIGHBORING ISLAND.

5. WE COULD SUGGEST TWO POSSIBLE REASONS FOR FEARS OF EXPATRIATE WORKERS ABOUT FUTURE OF BAHRAIN(S LIBERAL SOCIETY: FIRST, THE PROXIMITY OF THE "WAHHABI GIANT" TO BAHRAIN COULD MAGNIFY THE FRIGHTENING EFFECTS OF USUAL EXPATRIATE HORROR STORIES COMING OUT OF SAUDI ARABIA. SECOND, RUMORS AND REPORTS CITED COULD CONTAIN ELEMENT OF SELF-SERVING ON PART OF OLD BAHRAIN HANDS TRYING TO FRIGHTEN OFF POTENTIAL COMPETITORS AMONG NEW ARRIVALS. THESE NEWCOMERS MIGHT BE DISCOURAGED BY STORIES ABOUT IMMINENT DEMISE OF PERSIAN GULF'S EXPATRIATE PARADISE WHEN FIRST VEHICLES OVER NEW CAUSEWAY BRING DELEGATIONS OF PARTICULARLY STERN WAHHABI SHEIKHS. BUT WHATEVER THE CAUSE OF THESE FEARS, THE LACK OF UNDERSTANDING NOTED PARAGRAPH 3 ABOVE IS CERTAINLY A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR.

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6. WE AGREE WITH ANALYSIS PARA 4 REFTEL THAT CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO STATES ELIMINATES NEED FOR DISCUSSION OF THESE SOCIAL QUESTIONS. WE ARE NOT CERTAIN, HOWEVER, THAT BAHRAIN SHOULD COUNT ON GREATER LIBERALISM IN SAUDI ARABIA WHEN CAUSEWAY IS BUILT IN FIVE-SEVEN YEARS. MOREOVER, IF NATURE OF THE SAUDI-BAHRAIN RELATIONSHIP IS IN FACT AS DESCRIBED, THEN PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF CREEPING LIBERALISM IN SAUDI ARABIA WILL HAVE LITTLE EFFECT ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN BAHRAIN.

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